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Shapeshifters: Black Queer Land(ing) at Gibney Dance

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MAY 02, 2018 by MAURA DONOHUE in DANCE



Jumatatu Poe "Terrestrial" Photo by Scott Shaw

Gathering Place: Black Queer Land(ing), a three-week series conceived and curated by María Wethers at Gibney Dance’s Agnes Varis Performing Arts Center, included events that highlighted “intersections and crossroads among Blackness, queerness, and Indigeneity.” Artists mayfield brooks, jumatatu m. poe, and the I Moving Lab collective offered performance works, workshops, durational installations and audience activations that forged traditional practices, with queer sensibilities and the acumen of global Indigenous experiences to enact modern rituals of transformation and reorganization. The substance of each work was significantly compelling, but it was the accumulation of engagements that made María’s curatorial artistry especially potent. Material worlds came together with the divine, infiltrating mortal shells with eternal visitors and revealing shapeshifters among us.

mayfield brooks *IWB: Dancing in the Hold Part II*



*IWB:
Dancing in the Hold Part II*

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I wrote a piece for @culturebot about the fascinating and hilarious Rebecca Patek and her new show CHASM. Go see it for sure. culturebot.org/2018/02/28155/...



Feb 27, 2018

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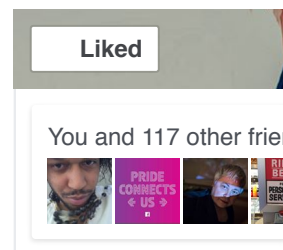


mayfield brooks and Mlodi Zondi "IWB Dancing in the Hold Part II" Photo by Scott Shaw

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performance in three parts from the ongoing investigation by mayfield brooks, *Improvising While Black (IWB)*. I had first encountered mayfield’s work through a 2016 *Contact Quarterly* interview about the use of dance improvisation for developing environments around “atmospheres of care and inquiry while listening to ancestral whispers of the middle passage.” I had taken a workshop with mayfield during the Movement Research Spring Festival last year and had recently curated a new work-in-progress by mayfield into the Estrogenius Festival. Part I, *P(a)rLAY* as a workshop for Black-identified artists was described on [Eva Yaa Asantewaa’s Infinite-Body blog](#).

Part II, *Dancing in the Hold*, in Gibney Dance’s new Black Box theater, submerged us below the ocean’s surface. *“Holds in older ships were below the orlop deck, the lower part of the interior of a ship’s hull, especially when considered as storage space, as for cargo”...As an audience member I invite you to immerse*



...

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~~once member, invite you to immerse~~
yourself in the wreck, dive into the hold.”

Brett Davis’s sculptures were spread around the space as luminous plastic columns filled with seaweed. We were in the wreckage of historic atrocity and shimmering transfigurations. Both mayfield and the dazzling Chicago-based, S. African artist Mlonzi wore silver dresses while a sequined sentinel (Eva Yaa Asantewaa) sat to my right. As the work progressed through rapid fire mutations in sound and body, the two artists called forth mania and beauty. Against a stinging reminder (“was the seed, was the cause”), with the mention of Rhodesia, of the brutal imperialist belief systems of the likes of Cecil John Rhodes who infected Africa and the world with his ideas of racial superiority and conquest, *Dancing in the Hold* expanded the shipwreck of transatlantic slavery and genocide into a new day, a new dawn.

jumatatu m. poe: *terrestrial*

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Jumatatu Poe & Samantha Speis “Terrestrial” Photo by Scott Shaw

eis and vocalist Rodrigo Jerônimo had already been pulsing in The Lab at Gibney Dance for two hours before I entered their realm. The trio employed stomping, vibrating physical states alongside sung and hummed vocals which allowed dreamscapes to seep in and out of the room. Inspired by the hot brown granules in both desert dirt and beach sand, *terrestrial* presented “humans as earth and Black humans as having a long, continuing terrestrial history that far precedes—and will outlive—the past five centuries of white supremacy’s specific oppressions.” While descriptively rooted in the surface-world, my experience of the artists was of a sacred communion of body and spirit. Here we were finally inhabiting the distant horizon, joining both heaven and earth seated at the feet of red eyed, heady guardians. The ripples through the bodies were seismic. As the three collapsed slowly to the floor, the settling occurred through a series of ruptures, earthquakes and aftershocks. The continent of Samantha lay close to my feet, and I could observe closely the magnificent mountain range of the spine. Delighted and in quiet awe, I saw planets

design a return to this sapient land, transmuting majesty into hills and valleys, resolving in the endless cycle of destroying all that was before to satisfy creation's call.

I Moving Lab: *I LAND 2018*



Leah Carrell *IMOVINGLAB I LAND 2018* by Scott Shaw

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g Lab collective shared *I LAND 2018*, an evening of works featuring Maori contemporary dance by Jack Gray, Bianca Hyslop (of Atamira Dance Company) and Dåkotta Alcantara-Camacho, as well as Indigenous hip hop and spoken word by Infinite Dåkotta and riveting songs from Lyla June Johnston. The I Moving Lab collective involves artists with lineages from Aotearoa (New Zealand), Guåhan (Guam), Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, and Turtle Island. There was a pre-show Gallery activation with healing balm from New Zealand and participatory chants. There was

an invitation to transfer items from the altar in the gallery onto an altar in The Theater at Gibney Dance. There was a “**Living Language Lessons**” from Karen Mosko. There were several seamless dances that directed energies with luscious ebb and flow, melding superb contemporary artistic practices with aesthetics and vocabularies drawn from the personal cultural traditions of the various artists. There was a constant simultaneity, a being-ness on multiple levels that expanded both into the future and the past, a constant becoming that flooded the space with power. And, in the end, there was an invitation for us to participate and join in the dance and song, to become community in preparation for the sequel... *All Nations Rise*.



Lyla June Johnston and cast | Moving Lab | Land 2018 Photo by Scott Shaw

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maura Donohue



Maura Nguyen Donohue has been making and performing experimental performance works in NYC since 1995. She has been a member of La MaMa's Great Jones

Rep since 1997. From '99-04, as artistic advisor for DTW's Mekong Project, she facilitated residencies in the US and SE Asia. She's currently serves on the board of Movement Research and on the Bessies Committee. Her essay "Ambivalent Selves: The Asian Female Body in American Concert Dance" was published in Contemporary Directions in Asian American

Dance. She is Associate Professor at Hunter College, faculty fellow for the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute, and is the mother of 2.

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